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AUTHOR Savage, Grant T.
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ABSTRACT

Intended for researchers and teachers of the small group process, decision making, and negotiation, this paper offers a review and critique of J. Habermas's theory of universal pragmatics. The first section of this paper retraces Habermas's theory, which seeks to free social action from false consciousness (that is, political ideologies) that systematically distort communication. The paper then articulates the eidetic and interpretive structure of dialogue and indicates a set of methodological criteria for critiquing communication. The final secion of the paper: (1) contrasts B. A. Fisher's and L. C. Hawes' interact system model of communication with a critical theory of dialogue, (2) differentiates between a critical theory of dialogue and current models of decision making and negotiation, (3) indicates how a critical theory of dialogue provides new directions for researching decision making and negotiation, and (4) provides several directives for facilitating consensual decision making. (HOD)

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A CRITICAL THEORY OF DIALOGUE: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS' THEORY OF UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF DECISION MAKING AND NEGOTIATION

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Grant T. Savage
Assistant Professor
Area of Management
College of Business Administration
Texas Tech University
Box 4320
Lubbock, TX 79409
(806) 742-3902

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes a two-fold contribution to Habermas' theory of universal pragmatics. On one hand, it supplements his theory of universal pragmatics by partially explicating the phenomenological/hermeneutic structure of dialogue. On the other hand, it provides a set of methodological criteria for critiquing communication, e.g., assessing whether group decision making is systematically distorted. For communication theorists, this paper offers new directions for decision making and negotiation research; for communication practitioners, it offers a set of directives for facilitating consensual decision making.

A CRITICAL THEORY OF DIALOGUE: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS' THEORY OF UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF DECISION MAKING AND NEGOTIATION

The review section of this paper retraces Habermas' critical theory of universal pragmatics, while the critique section articulates the eidetic and interpretive structure of dialogue, and indicates a set of methodological criteria for critiquing communication. The implications section (1) contrasts Fisher and Hawes' (1971) interact system model (ISM) of communication with a critical theory of dialogue, (2) differentiates between a critical theory of dialogue and current models of decision making (Fisher, 1970) and negotiation (Gulliver, 1979), (3) indicates how a critical theory of dialogue provides new directions for researching decision making and negotiation, and (4) provides several directives for facilitating consensual decision making.

Review: Habermas' Critical Theory of Universal Pragmatics

Habermas' (1979, 1982) theory of universal pragmatics has a critical aim since it seeks to free social action from "false consciousness," that is, political ideologies that systematically distort communication. As such, a critical theory of universal pragmatics has self-enlightment (Kortian, 1980) as its goal; it seeks to use rational reasoning to emancipate people from the self-deception caused by unconscious repressions of societal forms of domination (Habermas, 1971). Since linguisticality encompasses both self-reflective and self-deceptive forms of social action, Habermas (1970, 1971) seeks a basis for communication that prefigures speech and language.

In order to explicate the pre-linguistic structure of communication, Habermas (1970, 1971, 1979) employs a negative dialectic. Thus, he argues, the very fact that people (1) experience social actions in which interactants misrepresent reality, act inappropriately or unjustly toward one another, deliberately lie about their intentions, or remain incomprehensible and (2) recognize the invalidity of these actions indicates that all communication is oriented toward (anticipates) an ideal speech situation. This ideal speech situation complements the counterfactual, pragmatic experience of social action by providing it with a universal structure of four validity (truth) claims. Moreover, through a process of "reverse deduction," Habermas (1979, 1982) induces a typology of social action (including communicative and strategic action) from the four universal-pragmatic validity claims of intelligibility, truth, rightness, and sincerity.

Habermas' (1979) theory of universal pragmatics emphasizes the double structure (propositional content and illocutionary force) of speech since this structure introduces the possibility of thematizing, bracketing, and discursively redeeming truth claims. According to Habermas (1979), communicators may thematize three truth claims: (1) constative speech acts raise the claim of propositional truth, (2) regulative speech acts evoke the claim of appropriateness, and (3) avowed speech acts surface the claim of sincerity. The thematization of a truth claim anticipates that it can be fulfilled (redeemed); this implicit promise is the rational basis for illocutionary force. Testing this promise entails bracketing a validity claim and discursively seeking the grounds for the claim. Such discourse (dialectical dialogue) makes the bases for any consensus explicit and counters the "domination" of non-reflective opinion (ideology). Hence, by explicating the double structure of speech acts and the rational basis for illocutionary force,

Habermas (1979) produces a theory of communication that relies upon consensual reasoning: in other words, a critical theory of dialogue.

An Hermeneutic and Phenomenological Critique

The Eidetic and Interpretive Structures of Dialogue

However, since Habermas' (1979) universal-pragmatic theory does not sufficiently analyze the process of dialogue or discourse, it leaves unanswered several crucial questions about consensual reasoning: (1) How does the process of discourse (dialectical dialogue) lead to consensus? (2) How does the process of systematically distorted communication lead to a false consensus? (3) How (on what bases) can an observer distinguish between a "true" and a "false" consensus? Answers to these three questions require an explication of the process of dialogue. Phenomenology (which analyzes the eidetic structures of experience) and philosophical hermeneutics (which examines the linguistic experience of understanding and misunderstanding) provide Habermas' theory with a foundation for examining dialogue and, hence, determining whether social action is communicative or strategic. In other words, phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics supplement Habermas' critical theory by explicating the eidetic and interpretive structure of dialogue.

The eidetic structure of dialogue (Mickunas, 1982) requires a three-pronged relationship: (1) an orientation toward the signification of the state of affairs, (2) an orientation toward alter in terms of the signification of the state of affairs, and (3) an orientation toward oneself in terms of the signification of the state of affairs. The interpretive structure of dialogue (Bleicher, 1980; Heidegger, 1982; Gadamer, 1975) complements this eidetic structure; understanding is a circular process where one's "prejudices" anticipate the significance of something and are subsequently either fulfilled, rejected, or transformed. Hence, ego and alter's dialogue is oriented by

sedimented significations (prejudices). Three concepts--relevance, selectivity, and historicity--are implicated by the eidetic and interpretive structures of dialogue.

Relevance. Central to dialogue is the significative dimension which is constituted by corporeity (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Mickunas, 1982). While all communication is situated here-and-now and is limited by the expressive abilities of the communicators, communication as signification transcends its immediate context since significance is reiterable. The concept of relevance (Schutz, 1962, 1964), underscores how meaning relies on typifications, classifications, and other forms of contrasting and comparing the relatively stable aspects (eidos) of being-in-the-world (intentionality). In order to understand alter's motives, ego has to perceive what is relevant to alter. Dialogue calls for ego and alter to coorient themselves toward the significance (relevance) of some object, event, or state of affairs. This is possible since the dialogic experience constitutes a policentric field of action (Husserl, 1962) where ego is already decentered by the presence of alter. Hence, to understand (if only partially) the relevance of some state of affairs for alter, ego assumes the signifying orientation of alter (again, if only partially) by engaging in alter's project-at-hand. In short, the concept of relevance dictates that the meaning of something, either for the signifier or for the interpreter, is shaped by the mutual intentionality of the signifier and the interpreter.

Selectivity. Engagement in alter's project-at-hand, of course, is possible only to the extent that ego attends to those significations of alter that are reflective of alter's project (Schutz, 1962). The very fact that alter says something in this place, at this time, with this emphasis discloses the selectivity of expression, while ego's ability to attend to this or that expression, in a more or less involved manner, reveals the selectivity of

attention. The interplay of attention and expression indexes the selectivity of signification. By alternately accepting, rejecting, or rephrasing significations of the state of affairs, ego and alter may disclose (or obscure) its significance from a mutual horizon which intersects the individual horizon of each partner (Gadamer, 1979; Mickunas, 1982). Thus, only to the extent that ego (1) engages in alter's project and (2) accepts the engagement of alter in his or her own project is ego able to understand alter's motives.

Historicity. The concept of historicity "refers to the transcendence of the present moment toward the future" which is shaped by "an openness toward both the future and the past" (Stewart and Mickunas, 1974, p. 72), an openness which language and other institutionalized means of expression both allow and limit. Gadamer's (1975) account of historicity emphasizes the effect of historical consciousness upon interpretation. Linguistic terms, organizational forms, or cultural types unconsciously affect the dialogical partners' view of the world since such terms, forms, and types are pre-given in the social world and provide the background for engaging in and interpreting dialogue. Thus, ego and alter bring to a discussion a preunderstanding derived from both sedimented personal experiences and sedimented institutional experiences (due to language and other social institutions). Gadamer indicates that through dialectic ego discovers if his or her prejudices are sustained within alter's experience. In other words, dialectic is a testing of opinion that seeks that which is mutually "true" about the object of the conversation.

Methodological Criteria

The concepts of relevance, selectivity, and historicity provide answers to the questions raised in the preceding discussion and, thus, serve as methodological criteria for assessing social action.

(1) How does the process of discourse (dialectical dialogue) lead to consen-

sus? The concepts of selectivity and relevance imply that consensus occurs when the significative horizons (systems of relevance and intentional structures) of ego and alter intersect; importantly, this agreement about the relevance of something also implies a basis in differences since the significative horizons of ego and alter are not isomorphic. Moreover, the intersection of significative horizons relies upon traditions which provide the systems of relevances and intentional structures employed by ego and alter. This historicity, in turn, is the basis for both "true" and "false" consensus.

(2) How does the process of systematically distorted communication lead to a false consensus? Systematically distorted communication occurs when both partners to a discussion misapprehend the systems of relevances and/or intentional structures (opinions and values) guiding the discussion. Such mutual misapprehension occurs only if neither partner tests the grounds (opinions and values) on which a consensus rests.

(3) How (on what bases) can an observer distinguish between a "true" and a "false" consensus? First, the observer has to comprehend the significative horizons of both ego and alter. Second, the observer has to comprehend how ego and alter view the intersection of their two significative horizons. And, third, the observer has to compare ego and alter's view of the intersection of their significative horizons with his or her own comprehension of the significative horizons of ego and alter. In short, the observer must test the grounds for the consensus.

Hence, the criteria of relevance, selectivity, and historicity complement one another by dictating that the social scientific "observer" recognize how he or she participates in the very social event which he or she investigates. Reliance solely upon techniques of distancing only obscure the extent to which the researcher's understanding of social action depends upon the researcher's

value-orientations and project-at-hand intermeshing with the systems of relevance and intentionality of the subjects being observed. This dialectic means that the researcher cannot isolate him or herself from the social world in the name of objectivity and expect to accurately and reliably account for social action; in all such instances, the conclusions of the researcher will be value-latent. Indeed, the "critical" moment for the value-oriented researcher occurs when he or she shares his or her assessment of social action with the participants since their acknowledgement of that assessment completes the reflexive movement of critique.

Implications

The stance taken by the researcher who applies a critical theory of dialogue is perhaps best seen through contrast. Fisher and Hawes' (1971) interact system model (ISM) of communication explicates how many communication researchers examine decision making. This influential model, however, makes a number of assumptions about communication and methodology which are countered by a critical theory of dialogue. Hence, the first part of this section contrasts both the communication theory and the methodology supported by ISM with those of a critical theory of dialogue.

Communication Theory and Methodology

Fisher and Hawes' (1971) ISM attempts to build a grounded theory of communication by viewing interactions as behavioral systems. Assuming that observable communication behaviors are directly meaningful (may be assigned an unambiguous meaning by an observer), Fisher and Hawes call upon researchers to search for statistically significant patterns of behaviors in order to explain the phenomenon of small group decision making. Thus, ISM focuses on cyclical features of communicative behavior; i.e., repeated sequences of communicative interacts

identified within an empirical sample of small groups are used to predict the interaction of future decision making groups.

In contrast to ISM, a critical theory of dialogue assumes (1) that observable communication behaviors index multiple meanings (systems of relevance) and (2) that through the interplay of these relevances ego and alter selectively found a common core of significance about something. Hence, to explain the phenomenon of small group decision making, a critical theory of dialogue requires that the researcher examine not only the communication behaviors, but also the systems of relevance and selectivity of the group. Moreover, from the viewpoint of a critical dialogical theory, ISM's descriptive explanation of decision making is problematic since the researcher must assume that the meaning of a communicative behavior remains static over time. Thus, a critical theory of dialogue also proffers a temporally-oriented explanation of communicative behavior which takes into account the historicity of all communicative acts. Rather than predicting the interaction of future decision making groups, a critical theory of dialogue yields a means (1) to assess current decision making and (2) to anticipate the direction of future decision making.

The preceding argument may be augmented by illustrating (1) the theses of Fisher and Hawes' ISM and (2) the counter-theses of a critical theory of dialogue. Fisher and Hawes' ISM assumes the following about communication and methodology:

1. Communicative behaviors are isomorphic with significance. Thus, signification reflects a subject-object relationship in which ego (the researcher) perceives communicative behaviors as objects which are assigned unambiguous meanings.
2. To obtain constancy of meaning, the temporality of signification is ignored and communicative behaviors are thereby reified. Objectification

of communicative acts "freezes" the meaning of behaviors to a fixed system of signs and symbols.

3. Since behaviors are reduced to a fixed system of signs, numeric values may by assigned to specific behaviors so that appropriate statistical procedures may identify repeated behavioral sequences and cycles which portray the communicative process of decision making.

Countering the theses of Fisher and Hawes' ISM, a critical theory of dialogue makes the following assumptions about communication and methodology:

1. Communicative behaviors are indices of significance. Since dialogue requires an intersubjective attunement, signification reflects a threefold relationship to (a) the topic or object of a conversation, (b) alter's view of the topic, and (c) ego's view of the topic.
2. Constancy of meaning (a common core) is gained by accounting for temporality as the opening, shifting, and maintaining of past and future horizons in which ego's significations are selectively mediated by alter and appropriated in alter's significations and vice-versa. Significance thus viewed is a "founded whole," a melody that arises from the notes "played" by ego and alter.
3. The significance of some communicative behavior for an observer depends upon the observer's (a) system of relevances, (b) selective engagement in the situation observed, and (c) historical prejudices (hermeneutic or pre-interpretive framework). Since the relevance, selectivity, and historicity of the group observed may differ markedly from that of the observer, the observer cannot simply assume that his or her observations (significations) are valid.
4. Valid observations of communicative behaviors account for (but are not necessarily identical with) the participants' significations of those

same behaviors. Hence, "observers" will make valid observations only to the extent that they (a) participate in the situation and reflect upon their selective involvement in order to recognize their projects-at-hand; (b) test their systems of relevances against those used by participants in order to develop a shared language for signifying the relevance of the state-of-affairs; and (c) reflect upon how their prejudices--which are revealed through steps "a" and "b"--are supported, rejected, or transformed.

A critical theory of dialogue thus requires that the researcher engage in dialogue and reflect upon that engagement in order to investigate the process of decision making. This engagement and reflection, which seemingly are obviated in the ISM researcher's understanding of signification, merely remain hidden from view. Consider the following questions: How can the "same" expression mean more than one thing? How can the "same" thing be expressed in more than one way? Neither a fixed system of signs nor an isomorphism of meaning and behavior can address these questions. However, a critical dialogical theory can answer these questions by pointing to the significative dimension which underlies the multivalented nature of expression. It is this dimension upon which the researcher relies in order to "make sense" of his or her observations. Indeed, the difference between the ISM and the critical dialogical researcher lies in the latter researcher's recognition and orientation to the significative dimension. ISM researchers unreflectively "assign" sedimented significations to the behaviors that they observe, while critical dialogical researchers test the system of relevances which they selectively use through (1) engaging in dialogue with their "subjects" and (2) reflecting upon that engagement.

The upshot of this discussion is not to discredit the actual research find-

ings of investigators such as Fisher (or others that believe in the ISM); rather, this discussion suggests that such empiricist accounts of methodology are founded on misconceptions about how communication researchers actually go about their research. For example, Fisher's (1970) own account of his model of decision making shows that he was oriented by his own engagement in and reflection about decision making groups. Moreover, he relies on the significative dimension to differentiate between the orientation and emergence phase of his model. In both phases, the same behavior (ambiguous statements about decision proposals) occurs; however, Fisher assigns this behavior two different meanings: (1) it functions as a way to avoid being too assertive during the orientation phase and (2) it functions during the emergence phase as a means to save "face" while agreeing with the decision proposal which one had previously opposed. Hence, this discussion asks for a more complete accounting of the research process in terms of the communication praxis of the researcher in order to assess the validity of his or her findings.

Dialogue, Decision Making, and Negotiation

The preceding section lays the groundwork for differentiating between a critical theory of dialogue and current models of decision making and negotiation. Both Fisher's (1970) four-phase model of decision making and Gulliver's (1979) model of negotiation as joint decision making are briefly reviewed and then interpreted in terms of a critical theory of dialogue.

Fisher's model of decision making posits four phases: orientation, conflict, decision emergence, and reinforcement. Fisher's model delimits decision making by viewing it as a sequential process directed toward a particular outcome--a decision about some course of action. The phases that he proposes encompass the social action that transpires from the time a group meets to discuss a course of action to the point that a decision has been made

and accepted by the group. Each phase is interpreted in terms of its function for the group vis-a-vis this outcome. Thus, during the orientation phase, the group defines the situation for which the decision is a necessary outcome; the group contests various decision proposals during the conflict phase; during the emergence phase, the group chooses a particular proposal; and the group commits itself to this proposal during the reinforcement phase.

In a similar fashion, Gulliver's eight-phase developmental model of negotiation is outcome oriented. For example, the first phase, search for an arena for the negotiations, presupposes some sort of dispute settlement, just as each of the other phases (formulation of an agenda, preliminary statements of demands, narrowing of differences, preliminary bargaining, final bargaining, ritual confirmation, and implementation) articulate a set of activities which are oriented toward the settlement of a dispute. Indeed, Gulliver stresses that the developmental model idealizes the general pattern of movement that characterizes successful negotiation outcomes.

Although Fisher offers no explicit theory to explain how a decision making group moves from one phase to another, Gulliver does try to explain the movement from one phase of negotiation to another with a cyclical model of information exchange between the two negotiating parties. This model shows that through the exchange of information the disputing parties may either change their own preferences or their set of expectations about the other party's preferences, or both. Such changes set in motion the developmental phases of negotiation.

However, Gulliver's cyclical model of information exchange does not <u>explain</u> why negotiators are faced with the dilemma of being compelled to supply more information to their opponents than they wish, nor why providing information to an opponent obligates the opponent to reciprocate. A critical theory of

dialogue explains the negotiators "dilemma" by showing that communicative action has a rational basis. Interestingly, Niklas Luhmann (1979, p. 109) presents another explanation for this same "dilemma" which shows the compelling force of strategic actions which utilize the "communication media" of power or money:

> [B]y communication media I mean a mechanism additional to language, in other words a code of generalized symbols which guides the transmission of selections. In addition to language, which normally guarantees intersubjective comprehension, i.e., the recognition of the selection of the other party as a selection, communication media therefore have also a motivating fuction; for they urge the acceptance of other people's selections and as a rule make that acceptance the object of expectations. Accordingly, communication media can always be formulated when the manner of one partner's selection serves simultaneously as a motivating structure for the other. The symbols of this connection between selection and motivation then take on the function of a transmission and make clear the connection between the two aspects, so that this anticipatory connection can strengthen and, in addition, motivate the selectivity. (Luhmann, 1979, p. 111)

The distinction between communicative and strategic actions is clarified by Habermas (1982) in a reply to his critics; importantly, Habermas argues that the "communication media" of power or money may be linguistically mediated.

> Communication and purposive activity are two equally fundamental elements of social interactions. These interactions fall into two classes, depending on the mechanism for co-ordinating action: communicative action and strategic action. In the one case co-ordination takes place by way of building consensus, in the other case by way of complementing interest situations. In the former case communication in language has to serve as the medium for co-ordinating action; in the latter it can do so. To the extent that strategic interactions are linguistically mediated, language serves as a means of influencing. With reference to sanctions, ego brings alter to decisions from which ego expects consequences favourable to the attainment of its own ends. In doing so, ego does not--as it does in communicative action--first have to get involved in the consensus-forming function of language. If, on the other hand, ego and alter harmonise their plans of action with one another, that is, if they pursue their individual ends only under the condition of a communicatively produced consensus regarding the given situation, they have to make use of language in a manner orientated [sic] to reaching understanding. (1982, p. 237)

By delimiting both decision making and negotiation as outcome oriented,

Fisher and Gulliver explicitly formulate these two processes as purposive activities. Yet, Fisher argues that his model of decision making portrays a "the interaction process across time leading to group consensus on decision-making tasks" (1970, p. 54). And Gulliver, while more cautious, states that a negotiation's outcome "reflects the relative strengths of the parties in terms of their resources of material and symbolic power and the constraints of moral and practical rules and values in the society" (1979, p. 80). Thus both Fisher's and Gulliver's models exhibit an ambivalence toward the type of social action embodied by the processes of decision making and negotiation. In other words, neither Fisher's four-phase model of decision making nor Gulliver's two models of negotiation distinquish between strategic and communicative action. This is a crucial point since either form of social action may be used to coordinate the interests of group members or disputing parties.

A critical theory of dialogue contributes to decision making and negotiation theories not only by distinguishing between communicative action and strategic action, but also by explicating communicative action as the process of consensual reasoning. Dialectical dialogue, thus, underlies the "rationality" of consensually-based decision making and negotiation. For Habermas, consensus requires not only a shared definition of the situation, but also mutual agreement as to the validity about some course of action or settlement. Such validity cannot be merely assumed, but requires discourse (dialectical dialogue) to support the basis for the claim of validity. Phenomenological and hermeneutic theory further articulate dialectic as aiming at the merging of significative horizons which takes into account the systems of relevances, selectivity, and historicity of the group or of the disputing parties.

New Directions for Decision Making and Negotiation Research

Clearly, the processes of decision making and negotiation (1) may rely on

strategic and/or communicative actions and (2) decisions or settlements may be based upon consensus, pseudoconsensus, or a complementarity of interests. A variety of directions for future research may be delineated based on these insights. Directions for decision making research are discussed first, then directions for negotiation research are discussed.

Decision making. Current small group communication research of consensual decision-making has relied on self-report measures of consensus gathered after a group has arrived at a decision (Destephen, 1983; Hill, 1976; Knutson, 1972; Knutson and Holdridge, 1975; Knutson and Kowitz, 1977). Moreover, even dynamic measures of consensus (Spillman, Bezzek, and Spillman, 1979) rely on self-report instruments administered while a group is making a decision. Hence, this line of research treats consensus as an important outcome of group discussion, but it does not directly examine how the process of discussion affects consensus.

Also, and perhaps most importantly, consensus is usually considered by these researchers as unanimous agreement among group members upon some course of action. Since unanimity rarely occurs, a standard procedure is to ask group members to assign weights (values) to various alternatives which the group discusses. Groups in which members display similar values are considered to be closer to consensus than groups in which members exhibit diverse values.

A critical theory of dialogue (1) provides a more direct way to assess the process of consensual reasoning by (2) examining the significations of the various group members in terms of their systems of relevance, selectivity, and historicity. Consensus requires that the members reach an understanding, a merging of significative horizons; in contrast, "agreements" such as those measured by current researchers may mask pseudoconsensus or the simple complementarity of different interests. For example, group members may assign

various alternatives similar weights for very different reasons. Thus, the present means used to measure consensus may actually obscure the misunderstandings or different interests which are the basis for the observed "agreement."

In a similar fashion, a critical theory of dialogue introduces the possibility of addressing how groups may make more effective decisions. This question has traditionally been addressed by studying group problem-solving; recent studies of effective and ineffective problem-solving (Hirokawa, 1983; Hirokawa, 1982; Hirokawa, 1980) compare a group's solution with a model solution that a panel of experts have developed. This approach to problem-solving has several limitations when it is applied to decision making. The expert panel approach merely judges effectiveness in terms of the group's ability to match the system of relevances employed by the panel of experts; competing systems of relevance are thus ignored. Furthermore, this reduction obscures other factors which a critical theory of dialogue stresses: (1) the selectivity (intentional structures) of the group members and (2) the historicity (pre-interpretive framework) of the group. These three concepts (relevance, selectivity, and historicity) influence whether a group is more or less effective since a critical dialogical theory uses the criterion of consensus to assess the effectiveness of a group's decision making. Hence, from a critical dialogical theory perspective, it is not surprising that Hirokawa (1983) reports that "no single uniform sequence of [decision making] phases is necessarily associated with either "successful" or "unsuccessful" group problem-solving" (p. 291).

Poole (1983) argues that Hirokawa's (1983) finding supports his contention that phasic models of decision-making are overly simplistic. He presents a multiple sequence model of decision-making based on three "activity tracks:"

1. Task process activities: those activities the group enacts to manage its task.
2. Relational activities: those activities that reflect or manage relationships among group members as these relate to the group's work.
3. Topical focus: the substantive issues and arguments of concern to the group at a given point in the discussion. (1983, p. 326)

These three activity tracks "evolve simultaneously and interlock in different patterns over time" (Poole, 1983, p. 326). Poole argues that certain "breakpoints" may be identified that are crucial for tracing the development of a group's decision-making: (1) sanctioned or normal breakpoints, (2) delays, and (3) disruptions. The activity tracks and breakpoints are supplemented by taking into account structural requirements for decisions similar to those listed by Bales and Strodtbeck (1951). According to Poole, this framework is affected by two factors: the task (difficulty and coordination requirements) and the group's history (involvement, consensus, and procedural norms).

A critical theory of dialogue complements and further articulates Poole's model for assessing decision-making phases. For example, the triadic relationship of dialogue may be correlated with the three activity tracks that Poole presents: an orientation toward the significance of the state of affairs implies a topical focus; an orientation toward the other in terms of the significance of the state of affairs implies a relational activity; and an orientation toward oneself in terms of the significance of the state of affairs implies a task activity. Moreover, the thematizing and bracketing of truth claims provides a means for tracing "breakpoints" and plotting the development of the group's discussion. Furthermore, a critical theory of dialogue enhances Poole's model of the multiple and sequential development of decisions by taking into account how communicative and strategic actions are used to coordinate the interests of group members.

In summary, a critical theory of dialogue provides new insights for research

which examines consensual decision making, decision making effectiveness, and phases of decision making. By bringing the methodological criteria of relevance, selectivity, and historicity to bear upon each of these areas, future researchers should be able to address basic questions about decision making in a new and fruitful way.

Negotiation. Although many theories of negotiation (Homans, 1974; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Young, 1975) either implicitly or explicitly view negotiation as a form of strategic action, the discussion of Gulliver's (1979) theory of negotiation illustrated that it may also be viewed as a form of communicative action. Moreover, during the last decade, cooperative labor-management committees have created a context for viewing informal and non-contractual small group decision making as negotiation (Herrick, 1983; Van de Ven & Joyce, 1981; Zager & Rosow, 1982). In turn, organizational scholars have shown an interest in broadening the concepts of negotiation (Bazerman & Lewicki, 1983; Strauss, 1978) and decision making (Tompkins and Cheney, 1983; Lindblom, 1981; March, 1981). Kochan and Verma (1983, p. 15) and Lindblom (1981, p. 245) both note that efforts to enhance these concepts are based on interpretive approaches to organizations.

A critical theory of dialogue advocates a critical interpretive approach to both decision making and negotiation, and it raises several issues for researchers of negotiation. First, the relationship between decision making and negotiation demands further clarification. For example, it may be argued that decision making which involves polarization among group members may be considered a form of negotiation. This distinction appears fruitful if negotiators seek mutual understanding since it not only indicates issues for discussion, but also indicates that the definition of the situation must be addressed before these issues can be resolved. However, what are the

implications if one negotiator seeks a mutual understanding, but the other does not?

This raises a second issue requiring explication: the relationship between communicative and strategic actions as means for coordinating the interests of negotiators. More specifically, this issue can be formulated as a series of research questions: Under what conditions do communicative or strategic actions better enable negotiators to coordinate their interests? How may strategic actions further action oriented to reaching an understanding? How may communicative actions further unilateral ends? Answers to these questions require further explication of strategic actions as "communication media," as well as consideration of how such media systematically influence negotiators. Indeed, this line of inquiry is elaborated upon in Habermas' (1984) latest work.

A third issue which a critical dialogical theory raises concerns methodology. Much of the negotiation research conducted under the rubric of bargaining assumes that negotiators follow an economic model of reasoning; i.e., each negotiator attempts to maximize economic gains (Young, 1975). The methodological criteria of relevance, selectivity, and historicity offer researchers conceptual means for attempting to go beyond the "economic rational" approach. Addressing how these concepts may be most effectively applied to answer the questions previously raised is another fruitful direction for negotiation research.

Three Directives for Facilitating Consensual Decision Making

A critical theory of dialogue also implies certain directives for facilitating consensual decision making (and negotiations). First, a facilitator must test the grounds for any potential consensus; the system of relevances and intentionality of each party to an agreement must be mutually

acknowledged if a "true" consensus is sought. Second, the facilitator must recognize that groups making decisions or negotiating settlements may be swayed by irrational drives (e.g., Bion's [1961] basic assumptions) which means that the bases for agreements cannot be directly and "rationally" tested by the facilitator. Third, in such cases, the facilitator must employ strategic actions (albeit, oriented toward reaching an understanding) in order to induce the group to reflect upon and recognize the basis for its actions.

The first directive calls for the facilitator to engage the group in discourse (dialectical dialogue) about the grounds for a consensus. Moreover, the facilitator must reflect upon his or her participation in order to effectively engage the group in discourse. In other words, facilitators must (1) reflect upon their selective involvement in the group's discussion in order to perceive how their own intentional structures affect the group, (2) test their systems of relevance against those used by group members in order to mutually signify the relevance of the state of affairs, and (3) reflect upon how their prejudices and the prejudices of group members are supported, rejected, or transformed.

In contrast, directives two and three call for the facilitator to apply a "depth" hermeneutic. Hence, the facilitator (1) attends to the emotional expressions of the group to determine if the group is coordinating its actions via emotional valency rather than consensual reasoning; (2) rechannels the basic assumption by transfering its objective force, i.e., so it is directed toward him/herself or some other object; and (3) thematizes the resulting group catharsis in order to induce the group to reflect upon the bases for its actions.

Epilogue

Although the assessment of social action and the facilitation of communica-

tive action seem necessary to ensure "true" consensus, every consensus remains, in principle, open to dispute. Changes in the situation and/or in the significative horizons of the participants warrant the reconsideration of the bases for consensus. Thus, a critical theory of dialogue does not envision a utopian state of perfect agreement. Rather, it calls for a communicative ethic (praxis) in which the mutual interests of participants are actively sought and recognized in order to coordinate social interaction.

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